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AUTHOR Comor-Jacobs, Annie
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ABSTRACT

During the past 10 years, the community college student population and its needs have changed, calling for community college professors to develop a better understanding of their students and to provide the appropriate classroom environment and content for this population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, postsecondary enrollment growth rates are high for minorities, students over 25, two-year college students, part-time students, and women. Community college classrooms are particularly diverse, often encompassing an age span of 40 years and a wide range of skill deficiencies. Professors working with these students need to: (1) move from a professor-centered to a learner-centered environment, using such strategies as the "Unifoldment and Recall" technique in which each group member is recognized and receives "positive strength bombardments"; (2) de-emphasize lectures, assignments, and tests to place more emphasis on group discussion and goal setting; (3) pay close attention to how students' papers are graded and affirm and praise the accomplishments of low-achieving students; (4) use textbooks that are appropriate to students' reading levels and vocabularies; and (5) ensure that each students is tested and placed in the appropriate class. (KP)

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ED 370 630

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Students in the Classroom

Annie Comor-Jacobs

Wayne County Community College
Detroit, MI

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"MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM"

In the past, the role of the community college professor was one of disseminating information by means of a lecture. This lecture in the classroom was content oriented and given to eagerly awaiting students.

But in the last ten years there has been a change in our student population and their needs.

This paper will address the two areas that we need to be sensitive to as community college professors. First, we need to better understand our student population. Secondly, we need to provide the appropriate classroom environment and content for this population.

Around the 1960's and early 1970's students from many economic and ethnic populations not well represented in higher education began increasing their enrollment in colleges. The following shows the "Trends in College Enrollment": 1972 to 1982, from Community and Junior College Journal, May, 1984, according to the National Center for Education Statistics:

1. Growth rates were quite high for Blacks and other races 10.4% in 1972 to 14.3% ten years later.
2. Growth rates were high for persons 25 years old and over -28.0% in 1972 to 35.6% in 1982.
3. Growth rates were high for students in two-year institutions -29.9% in 1972 to 38.45 in 1982.
4. Growth rates were high for part-time students - 3.1% in 1972 to 41.9% in 1982.

5. Growth rates were high for women - 43.1% in 1972 to 51.5% in 1982.

In addition to the trends, Rouche & Armes, September 1983, Community and Junior College Journal, stated the following on "Diversity in the Classroom":

1. Age span of 40 years in our classroom
2. Multiethnic
3. Multiracial
4. Urban
5. Rural
6. A range of skills from the functional illiterates who read below the fourth grade reading level to those in need of developmental work.
7. A multitude of potential learners who are already motivated and self-directed.

Not only do we have this wide range of diversity in the classroom but Rouche & Armes stated that professors have additional issues confronting them in the classroom:

1. Students learn at different rates.
2. Students demonstrate different spans of ability.
3. Students learn in different ways.
4. Students are poor readers and inexperienced writers.
5. Students do not know how to listen.
6. Students do not process information well.
7. Students do not have enough practice time.

With this background of information, our second question becomes, how do we best meet our students needs?

First of all, in terms of the appropriate classroom environment, we need to move from a professor-centered to a learner-centered environment. By this we mean, the days are past where professors stand and dispense information, rather than exchange ideas with their students. Where professors remain aloof and do not allow for any personal contact with their students, - where the professor is just looking at a 15 or 16 week course rather than the long term development of the student. In a learner-centered environment, the objectives would be to retain students by providing an optimum learning environment which recognizes students' need for support, group interaction, and most of all. a relatively anxiety-free learning experience. This objective can be achieved in an environment that uses the technique of, "Unifoldment and Recall" (A human potential training strategy by which each group member is recognized by the group and receives "positive strength bombardments".) This aims toward a "kinship" or notion of group reference as well enhancing self-concept. The professor is a part of working toward common goals. In a learner-centered environment many professors change the physical setting of the classroom. The desks are arranged in a circle to allow for eye contact and communication between learners. The professor is removed from the "head" of class position of authority to part of the group and is viewed as the learning facilitator.

Secondly, we need to look at our method of instruction. Marvin Feldman, (Aug/Sept. 1989) AACJC Journal, stated, "so now we are no longer distinctive because of how we teach. The time has come for us to give an absolute priority to the business of

teaching." In the business of teaching, we need to use a variety of instruction to meet our students' needs. We need to de-emphasize lectures, assignments and tests and place more emphasis on group discussion and group goal setting. We need to emphasize periodic small group (peer group tutoring) activity. While in the small groups, professors should facilitate group structuring insuring that groups include young and old, male and female, task oriented learners and socially oriented learners. Small group situations should also foster age and learning strength diversity creating situations where the more able help the less able and also learn more by "teaching". The professor should also move from group to group, becoming temporarily, part of the group's learning activity of each group. In addition, small group discussion allows for and encourages non-vocal students to voice ideas and ask questions. From time to time professors should provide activity periods where students work individually on projects specifically designed to meet particular learning needs. When appropriate we should incorporate computers, movies, television, reading machines and other technical learning equipment into our classrooms.

Thirdly, in motivating students, we need to pay close attention to how we grade our student's papers and how we affirm our praise the accomplishments of low achieving students. We might use green pens to correct our student's assignments. Then when we grade or correct student's work, we find some aspect of their work to praise. In class and after class we verbally praise and encourage our students. Many professors have the students praise each other in class by clapping.

Fourthly, our books must be appropriate to meet out student's needs. From time to time we need to ask ourselves, why am I using this particular book? Is this book meeting my students' needs? Is the material moving from concrete or actual life situations to abstract or theory? Let's look at these examples:

1. The following list contains three correct answers and one incorrect answer. Choose the incorrect answer and draw a circle around it.

   A BATTLE OF THE CIVIL WAR

   1. Bull Run
   2. Chancellorsville
   3. Gettysburg
   4. Okinawa

This is a lesson from a basic reading course. The reading level is about 4th to 6th grade. This part of the book deals with Study Skills and How To Take Tests. What I have found is that 90% of my students do not know the answer to this question. So, in addition to a discussion on test taking, we also discuss the Civil War and World War II. Sometimes our goals for a lesson have to be changed to include the goals of clearing up misinformation or lack of information not known by our students. Let's look at this example:

FILL IN THE BLANK WITH THE WORD THAT COMPLETES THE ANALOGY

Tree: Paper: Cow: _____

a) dairy b) farm c) leather

This example was taken from the same course and book as above. About 50% of my students selected "dairy", because they associated a "cow" with "dairy". Then I usually ask, "Where does leather come

from?" Most of my students do not know. We then discuss that leather comes from cows. That is why every piece looks different and why leather and suede are so expensive.

When we have students reading below the fourth grade level it is sometimes difficult to find appropriate material. But I have found books on the first and second grade level for a class of students who enter 0 - first grade. This book is chosen because it was not only easy to read but it also covers the following high interest stories of 10 each:

1. Interesting People
2. Science and Nature
3. Around the World
4. Fun things to Know

The stories are reading level appropriate and the vocabularies are just the right length.

After reading the selection they complete Comprehensive Activities. One question might ask them to draw a globe. This gives the class an opportunity to discuss the globe and the world around us. Some of the stories discuss interesting people like Mozart. Some lessons discuss Greek Mythology. Not only are they reading and writing on their level but they are also expanding their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. We also have reading lessons on what we call "Life Skills". We read, for example, a story on how to buy a used car. The students are warned to look at the tires, etc. We must realize that these are only remedial or developmental students in our buildings. To the world outside, they are viewed as competent adults. Somewhere in our

teaching we must provide a greater opportunity for some measure of success, no matter how large or how small.

Finally, in addition to various teaching techniques and a learner-centered environment we must also insure that each student is tested and placed in the appropriate class. Mickler & Chapel, (Fall, 1989), Journal of Developmental Education, "Basic Skills in College: Academic Dilution or Solution?", discussed the high success rate at Miami-Dade Community College Comparative Guidance and Placement Program. The program is successful because the students are tested, and the results of the tests, in conjunction with a student interview, the students are placed in the appropriate remedial or developmental courses and locked out of inappropriate courses. Currently at Wayne County Community College we are using the ASSET TEST at Orientation for placement. Based on their test scores, the students are advised to take certain courses. Note that I said advised, not required. Perhaps in the future all community colleges will test students and look them into their appropriate courses so that the student can be successful. Mickler & Chapel stated: "...courses in the basic skills do not suggest that college credit should be allowed for remedial work nor that developmental students should be allowed for remedial work nor that developmental students should be allowed to dilute academic standards by enrolling in courses in which they have little chance for success. Prerequisites should be established and enforced so instructors are not faced with the dilemma of lowering standards or failing students who have been inappropriately enrolled in courses beyond their capabilities."

In conclusion, we must begin now to know our diverse students and to meet their academic needs. We must be flexible and have the ability to **CHANGE.**

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